

a magazine for friends of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation

GREATER together

**Standing strong for
systems and our
neighbors who
need us most**



Greater Milwaukee
FOUNDATION
greater together

Volume 11 Issue 1 Summer 2026

GREATER together

A MAGAZINE FOR FRIENDS OF THE
GREATER MILWAUKEE FOUNDATION
VOLUME 11 :: ISSUE 1 :: SUMMER 2026

VISION Greater Milwaukee becomes a vibrant, economically thriving region comprised of welcoming and inclusive communities that provide opportunity, prosperity and a high quality of life for all.

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ON THE COVER:



A member of the People's Table food collective sorts food at St. Hyacinth Food Pantry on Milwaukee's south side.

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Foundation President and CEO Greg Wesley chats with a community member at the Foundation's Black History Bingo event in February at ThriveOn King.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I've been reflecting recently on the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's ability to meet the moment. Community circumstances have demanded this with increasing frequency it seems – whether we are responding to damaging flood waters, decreases in federal funding for nonprofits or economic hardship in our region. Our cover story in this edition of Greater Together explores how the Foundation recognized the growing strain on our community's social safety net and met the moment with expanded support for basic needs such as food and shelter.

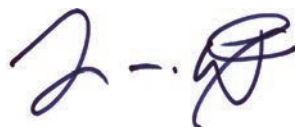
What stands out to me more than anything is the solidarity I sense among food and housing agencies, generous donors who want their gifts to make a meaningful difference and local civic leaders in philanthropy and human service sectors, including our Foundation staff. Organizations are banding together to share knowledge and resources, to advocate in one voice and to maximize their impact on a community with growing needs.

By working together, we not only are answering the call for urgent aid, we are beginning to improve the systems responsible for ensuring all in our community experience stability and the ability to thrive.

This dual approach of immediate action and long-term transformation is at the heart of the Foundation's current strategic planning process. To plot a course for our future work and impact, we've engaged hundreds of donors, nonprofit leaders, civic leaders, funders and residents across greater Milwaukee since the process began in summer 2025.

We've been listening to you, and we understand our role as a bridge between targeted impact that addresses both acute and chronic community needs and the impact of donors driven by personal interests and love of community.

I look forward to sharing the strategic direction we've been developing together so we can take that next, big step forward toward a Milwaukee for all. In the meantime, thank you for your partnership.



Gregory M. Wesley, J.D.
President & CEO
Greater Milwaukee Foundation

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Since 2021, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and our donors have provided more than \$18 million in basic needs funding to support providers such as People's Table, a nonprofit that runs both a food pantry and a food collective.



RISING

to meet the moment:

Inside the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's deepening support for the region's food and shelter providers

An unexpected car repair. A costly, unplanned medical procedure. A sudden job loss that prevents one from paying a utility bill or rent on time.

There are many factors that contribute to why individuals might turn for help to safety net providers such as the Food Pantry of Waukesha County or Guest House of Milwaukee. And these nonprofits have helped rising numbers of our neighbors who have faced food insecurity or housing instability. Food Pantry, for example, has seen a 114 percent increase in household visits since 2021.

But the local food and shelter systems themselves are navigating new and compounding pressures due to evolving funding landscapes, rising costs of living and other factors.

"Supportive structures are being diminished, and the need is only going to grow," said Stephen Bauer, Guest House CEO. "We do good work, but it takes a village."

“Supportive structures are being diminished, and the need is only going to grow. We do good work, but it takes a village.”

Stephen Bauer, Guest House CEO

Over the years, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation has been a convener, connector and critical philanthropic resource to help providers meet the moment. In the past five years alone, Board-directed

grantmaking toward basic needs has totaled more than \$3 million. Donors, meanwhile, have contributed more than \$15 million from their funds.

"We have gone from just grantmaking to trying to invest much more deeply into relationships with organizations," said Dani Breen, the Foundation's senior portfolio manager for basic needs and housing.

THE LANDSCAPE OF NEED

For shelter providers, a change in priorities with the current administration has led to shifts in federal funding that pose a threat to the consistent success Milwaukee has had with its Housing First model. The model prioritizes getting individuals into housing immediately and then surrounding them with supportive services. That approach has decreased Milwaukee's homeless rate by 41 percent over the past decade, while nationally the rate increased by 34 percent.

"Milwaukee is an inspiring place – especially in the homeless sector," said Krystina Kohler, impact manager for the United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County's Safe and Stable Homes Initiative. "Everybody is collaborative and willing and brave enough to fund the things that work and also have a high sense of dignity for people experiencing homelessness."

Each year, the Milwaukee shelter system receives about \$16 million in federal funding, 90 percent of which is used to keep people in stable housing. Late last year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development canceled the second year of promised funding and proposed adjusted funding rules that slashed support for permanent housing.

Basic needs funding since 2021

In the past five years, basic needs funding has exceeded

\$18M

More than

\$15M

in donor-directed grants

More than

\$3M

in board-directed grants

More than 1,000 area residents are at risk of losing housing, and more than 20 housing programs will be impacted, according to the Milwaukee Shelter & Transitional Housing Task Force.

For an agency that already runs on pretty thin margins, Bauer said, the unpredictability with federal funding has affected its ability to effectively budget for 2026.

"We have had a hell of a year trying to navigate the changes," he said. "As a system, we cannot withstand a cut in funding without closures and more people on the street needing help."

While rising food prices and cuts in food assistance programs have caused some individuals and families to turn to food pantries, the pantries themselves are also facing the squeeze. There was a period in 2025 when the Food Pantry of Waukesha County found it difficult to acquire chicken because of supply chain issues and had to stop buying eggs for a while due to the inflated costs. Interchange, a citywide food pantry with a downtown Milwaukee location and a site at St. Mark AME Church, saw an 11 percent increase in fruit and vegetable costs. A \$75,000 Foundation grant helped it continue funding its cornerstone program, the Fresh and Frozen Purchase Program, which began in 2017.

“Milwaukee is an inspiring place. Everybody is collaborative and willing and brave enough to fund the things that work and also have a high sense of dignity for people experiencing homelessness.”

*Krystina Kohler, Impact Manager
Safe & Stable Homes
United Way of Greater Milwaukee
and Waukesha County*

Milwaukee's unique success in addressing homelessness

#1

- Lowest count of unsheltered individuals
- Lowest count of chronically homeless individuals

3rd

- Lowest number of families experiencing homelessness
- Lowest overall count of all individuals experiencing literal homelessness of some kind (emergency shelter, transitional housing, safe haven, unsheltered)

10th

- Lowest count of homeless vets, and tied for the lowest count of unsheltered veterans of major cities in the United States

**Numbers from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Point-in-Time data as of 2024*



A Foundation grant helped Life Center Milwaukee, a small food bank, purchase a refrigerated box truck to help deliver more food to area food pantries.

“Our mission is to provide nutritious food,” said George Neureuther, executive director of Interchange, which serves about 1,400 households each month. “It is an expensive program, but it is the best thing we can provide our guests.”

Meanwhile, the number of guests has grown, yet the federal support those pantries once received during the pandemic has dried up.

A HISTORY OF MEETING THE MOMENT

With the belief that access to food and shelter are basic human rights, the Foundation has long leveraged existing community strengths and assets to increase access to shelter and healthy food systems.

Sixteen years ago, the Foundation invested money to help Milwaukee develop a central access and case management system for the homeless. The coordinated entry system allows staff at area shelters to identify openings and make immediate referrals for

people looking for places to stay as well as to provide case management services to enable families to remain in their own homes.

Over the years, the Foundation’s financial support also has taken the form of capital grants. Grants have purchased washers and dryers, supported new kitchen equipment and security upgrades, and covered emergency elevator repairs.

Life Center Milwaukee, a small food bank that started in 2019, was looking to build its capacity to serve more food pantries and deliver more food but needed a refrigerated box truck to do so.

“Receiving a grant from the Foundation was a breath of hope,” said Tara Ingham, food bank director. “It provided a vote of confidence to additional donors and volunteers going forward. They know that if the Foundation believes in what you are doing, they can easily, too.”

“

I want the money to do the very most it can in the right places – for that I rely on the Foundation.”

Adviser to the Catherine and Walter Lindsay Foundation Fund

A Food Pantry of Waukesha County volunteer sorts food at the nonprofit's warehouse.



In recent years, the Foundation has taken a more trust-based philanthropy approach, Breen said.

“We approach nonprofits as the subject matter experts,” Breen said. “How can we advocate and allocate dollars to make the biggest difference?”

One example is multi-year general operating grant support. This type of funding provides organizations such as Ebenezer Stone Ministries with the flexibility needed to conduct its core mission. It received a three-year, \$150,000 grant to support its hot meals program and warehouse and food pantry operations.

Unrestricted grant support also helps fuel innovative approaches like that of the People’s Table, a 20-year-old food pantry on Milwaukee’s south side that serves 500 families a month and also introduced a food collective concept. Under the model, which it started in 2019, members meet once or twice a month and unload the food trucks, sort inventory, share a potluck meal and access community resources. The organization operates four collectives and hopes to create more.

“It is one of the ways that we can provide a holistic approach to addressing the needs of the human person,” said Jack Bolog, director of operations.

As the food collective does not operate like a typical food pantry, the nonprofit is ineligible for government funding, which makes philanthropic support essential. The Foundation provided \$90,000 in general operating support last year to fund the work.

“The Foundation is one that you can always turn to if you have an idea,” said Wendy Weckler, former executive director of Hope House who now is leading Milwaukee’s Continuum of Care, a collaborative of housing and shelter providers.

Several years ago, the Foundation and United Way approached the Continuum of Care to ask about the biggest need facing shelters. Nonprofits said funding for a community case manager would help prevent many individuals and families from becoming homeless. The nonprofits selected Guest House and Pathfinders to steward the grants, and the two funders pooled resources to support the case manager role as well as a flexible source of funding that case managers could use to support clients’ immediate expenses, such as utility payments and security deposits.

“It is that flexible funding that allows the program to be so successful,” Bauer said.

DEEPENING ENGAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY

The Foundation does not work alone in its support of the housing and food sectors. Deep trust and engagement with donors along with close partnerships with local funders help fuel efforts to address challenges that arise.

“There is a tremendous number of very generous people in our community, and the Foundation is able to connect those generous people with nonprofits that need that support,” said Lyndsay Johnson, executive director of the Food Pantry of Waukesha County. Over the years, her agency has become more reliant on food drives and private donations. The agency has received more than \$600,000 in support from the Foundation and its donors over the past three decades.

In November 2025, when FoodShare benefits were delayed due to the extended government shutdown, the Foundation convened several area funders as

well as the Hunger Task Force and Feeding America to assess the needs. This led to grants to the area’s two largest food banks to support additional food purchasing. The Foundation also contacted members of the Greater Milwaukee Food Pantry Coalition to quickly assess the local impact. It compiled a list of nearly 70 area food pantries, which it added to its website and shared with donors.

Donors, particularly those who live out of the area but support causes in Milwaukee, depend on that depth of knowledge of the local landscape.

“I want the money to do the very most it can in the right places – for that I rely on the Foundation,” said the adviser to the Catherine and Walter Lindsay Foundation Fund, who lives out of state. She has contributed to individual providers such as the Guest House and Food Pantry of Waukesha County as well as has given \$150,000 to the Basic Needs Fund after her philanthropic adviser shared news of the local food security crisis.



Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Rescue Mission

“ We approach nonprofits as the subject matter experts. How can we advocate and allocate dollars to make the biggest difference in Milwaukee?”

Dani Breen, senior portfolio manager, Greater Milwaukee Foundation

The Foundation also has raised awareness among its donors of critical issues such as homelessness, said Pat Dunphy, who has had a donor advised fund since 2015. His fund primarily supports Jesuit education and the Guest House, and he has provided matching funds to encourage others to give. Based on a suggestion from his philanthropic adviser, he also set up a designated fund for the Guest House.

“My donor advised fund creates the opportunity to reach out to other donors and inform them of the root causes. Their willingness to match funds is so important to support individuals who deserve help and to be treated with understanding and dignity,” said Dunphy, who also chairs Guest House’s board.

For the Milwaukee Rescue Mission, which doesn’t receive federal funding, individual donor support becomes even more vital. On any given night, the 133-year-old agency serves more than 200 men, women and children in its various shelter programs. It served 14 percent more people last year than in 2024.

“Donor advised funds and direct support from the Foundation has been an enormous resource for us,” said Patrick Vanderburgh, the nonprofit’s president.

The organization has more than 30,000 regular contributors, and it was one of the top 10 agencies to which Foundation donors gave in 2025. One of the Foundation’s designated funds has provided more than \$9 million to the agency since 1994.

FROM SHORT-TERM RESPONSE TO LONG-TERM VISION OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

The Foundation has a history of responsive grantmaking for immediate food and shelter needs. For many years, it has provided support for overnight warming shelters, which serve about 250 individuals on an average night in the winter.

But the Foundation also remains steadfast in its commitment to create more equitable systems. The Greater Milwaukee Food Pantry Coalition is a more recent development that aims to do just that. In 2024,

“

It benefits everybody who lives and works in the greater Milwaukee area to deal with the problems that cause homelessness.”

Pat Dunphy, Foundation donor and Guest House board member





Photo courtesy of Milwaukee Rescue Mission

Foundation staffer Breen started having conversations with individual food pantries and held a summit. In 2025, she began convening pantries quarterly to discuss issues and challenges.

“Food pantries are very often the front lines for addressing issues people are facing in their lives,” said Bolog of The People’s Table. “The goal is just to bring food pantries together, leverage our collective resource pool, and from there make long-term, lasting impact in the Milwaukee area.”

The Foundation also believes that an informed community is a stronger community and that knowledge and awareness create change. Toward that end, in 2025, it made a \$150,000 grant to fuel the continued growth of the Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service’s basic needs reporting, which began during COVID to address urgent food and housing needs in Milwaukee’s Black and Brown communities, as well as the news service’s multimedia storytelling capabilities. Under development is a Foundation-commissioned study that will focus on food access in Milwaukee. Foundation leadership hopes it will generate insights and identify potential opportunities for coordinated investment to help create a more equitable food system in the region.

“Funders are never able to plug all the holes, but if we can have targeted investments, hopefully we can ease the situation,” Breen said. “We are trying to listen and respond and build things that can create a better future – a Milwaukee for all.”

BASIC NEEDS FUND

Born in a moment of crisis, built for resilience

Basic needs have long been a focus area of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and its donors.

Nearly 20 years ago, the Foundation created the Basic Needs Fund to address urgent community needs born out of the economic downturn at the time. Special attention was given to safety net service providers, such as food pantries and homeless shelters, in Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha counties.

In the years since, individuals and other local funders have rallied around this common cause – especially during moments of national and local crisis – giving support to help providers keep up with demand. Today, the fund remains a key resource in the Foundation’s efforts to ensure people’s essential needs are met.

Total donations to the fund:

More than

\$5.8 million

including more than \$206,000 in 2025.

Total grants from the fund:

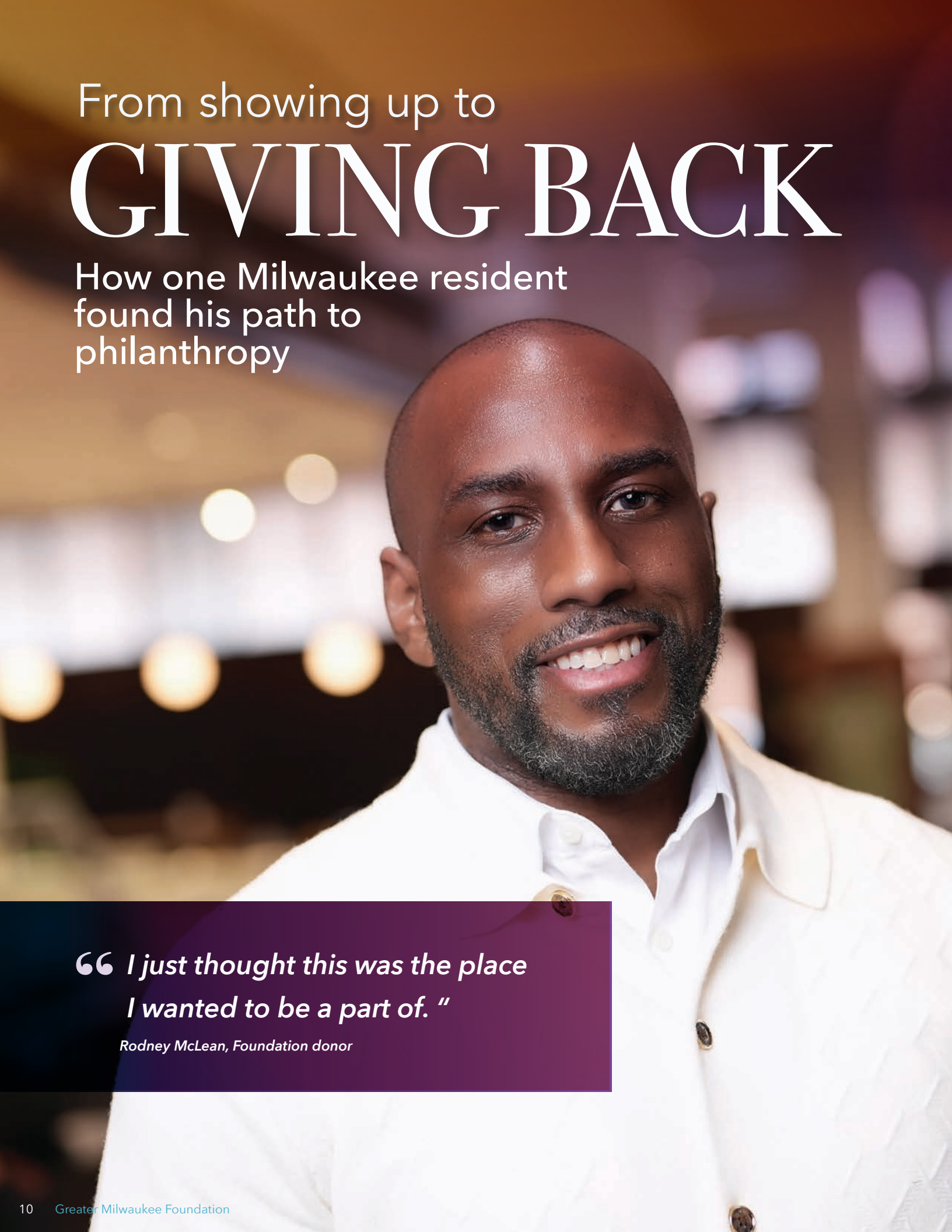
Approximately

\$5.6 million

How you can help:

Anyone can give. A gift of any amount helps build support for basic needs.

Visit greatermilwaukeefoundation.org/giveonline



From showing up to GIVING BACK

How one Milwaukee resident
found his path to
philanthropy

“ I just thought this was the place
I wanted to be a part of. ”

Rodney McLean, Foundation donor

Over the past 25 years, Rodney McLean has steadily advanced in his professional career, rising to executive leadership roles with large corporations, including GE, Pricewaterhouse Coopers and Johnson Controls.

Although he has travelled millions of miles nationally and internationally for work, he has always made it a priority to give his time to the communities he has called home.

"It was second nature to show up for folks and just be involved – so much so that I feel kind of empty if I'm not doing something," said McLean, vice president at a Washington, D.C.-based global energy storage company.

His volunteering began as a kid when he helped his church's deaconess, his mother, with clothing drives and soup kitchen preparations in their hometown of Newburgh, New York. He has served as a mentor, a tutor and nonprofit board member since then.

But a philanthropist? McLean wouldn't have used that term to describe his work.

That was until he attended the Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Black Philanthropy Month event in August 2025, which featured conversations with Black donors, professionals and community leaders. Philanthropy involves time, talent, treasure and ties, and the moment is now for collaboration and collective impact in our community, they implored. McLean took that call to heart and took his involvement to the next level by creating the McLean Cares Fund, a donor advised fund.

Prior to our Black Philanthropy event, what did philanthropy mean to you?

I thought it was something that you do when you are retired, and you have some assets that you might want to figure out how to deploy somewhere as you are thinking about what's after life. But it was not something I thought I would actively be doing at this point in my life.

What about that gathering really inspired you?

The panel (Cecelia Gore, executive director of the Brewers Community Foundation; Blaine Gibson, financial adviser with RBC Wealth Management; and John Daniels III, executive director of A.L.I.V.E. MKE) and message from



Rodney McLean felt inspired to start his donor advised fund after attending the Foundation's Black Philanthropy event in 2025.

Greg Wesley were amazing! Seeing the generations of folks who have been involved and have been partnering with the Foundation over time – I thought, "That's a way I can find my way to impact the community since I've been living here for 10 years."

How do you see us helping you maximize your giving?

The Foundation is plugged into all things in Milwaukee and is known across the country for how well funded and well run it is. I respect what you guys are doing, and I see the growth here. I just thought this was the place I wanted to be a part of.

What interest areas are you most passionate about?

I want to be there to help single mothers, in tribute to my mother. She's a lady that pretty much fulfilled all of her dreams by herself. But maybe she had help that I didn't know about. I want to help single moms with whatever challenges they might have in today's economy and today's environment.

What excites you most about being a new donor?

I have some purpose and a goal to achieve. This is something that is right in front of me, and I can continuously fight to make it bigger. Competitive Rodney is coming out now! I know to get my fund started I needed \$25,000, but I want it to be about \$5 million!

For Michael Johnston, every performance is an **ACT OF GIVING**

Like many kids growing up, Michael Johnston was looking to fit in.

Sports didn't interest him as it did his four brothers, and he didn't have many friends. He found it far easier to get along with adults than kids his own age.

Johnston found an escape from his loneliness and insecurity in the arts. He would go to the library and devour all the books and magazines about New York City, Broadway and the theater. He'd spend hours watching old films and soap operas.

"It was always so much fun to watch all the glamour of Hollywood," Johnston said. "I wanted to be a part of that."



What initially started as a diversion has since become a calling, as both an entertainer and a philanthropist. It was while performing at a fundraiser in the

1980s for the Cream City Chorus, a LGBTQ+ choral group, that Johnston first gained recognition, applause and the event's only encore performing as drag persona Karen Valentine. He later earned a \$250 prize for performing in a local talent search competition.

"My philanthropy started with that because I gave the money to the chorus," said Johnston, who has a background in marketing and communications and has spent the past 20 years working at a prominent health care system. "I guess that is what we are looking for – our niche. Singing was my niche and drag was the other one."

Described as a bon vivant, Grand Dame of Milwaukee, empress of elegance and queen of hearts, Johnston's Karen Valentine, or KV, has found followers and fame over the past 40 years as an entertainer, hostess and headliner.

"I never thought it would turn into the cottage industry that it has become," said Johnston, who, as KV, was featured as one of 80 performers in "Legends of Drag: Queens of a Certain Age," a photo book and archive of drag history in the United States.



Michael Johnston (inset photo:
His drag persona, Karen Valentine)

That persona has also allowed Johnston to create a legacy of giving. For the past 15 years, he has been an adviser to a fund at the Cream City Foundation, one of the oldest LGBTQ+ foundations in the country and a partner foundation of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. In 2025, the fund provided \$44,500 in grants to 19 nonprofits.

"I think we all want a purpose in this life," said Johnston, who personally contributes annually to the fund. "And this is what I'm trying to do for the world. I'm trying to make it a little better, and the route I try to take is through the arts."

Johnston's history with the Cream City Foundation stretches back to the early 1990s, when it was a client of his employer, a local advertising agency. The agency worked on fundraisers and other projects for a number of LGBTQ+ groups, and Johnston became acquainted with the foundation's leadership and several of its donors.

When he turned 50, Johnston threw a birthday celebration at The Room of Boom, a gay club where he was bartending at the time. A friend suggested that in lieu of birthday gifts, Johnston should encourage attendees to contribute to a cause that mattered to him. Per an idea from friend and philanthropist Joe Pabst, Johnston chose the foundation's new arts fund. Pabst had donated money to create the fund to support LGBTQ+ programs in Milwaukee, specifically in arts, culture and the humanities.

“ I think we all want a purpose in this life, and this is what I’m trying to do for the world. I’m trying to make it a little better, and the route I try to take is through the arts.”

*Michael Johnston,
Cream City Foundation donor*

That afternoon Johnston raised \$5,000. A month later, after sitting down with Pabst and the Cream City Foundation's executive director at the time, the fund was renamed The Valentine Fund, and Johnston became the fund's sole adviser.

While continuing to focus on the fund's original purpose, Johnston also likes to support grassroots



Karen Valentine at a Club Charlie's Sunday Funday Show Tunes event with restaurant owner Craig Bloomfield and Cream City Foundation board member Gerron Jordan.

groups that provide arts programming for youth. One of the programs he has supported over the past several years is Ex Fabula's Youth Affinity Storytelling. The program offers storytelling workshops to help youth develop self-advocacy skills, identify strengths and build relationships; it culminates with a story slam. In 2024, he emceed the event as KV at PrideFest and was impressed by the strength shown and stories shared by the students.

"They blew my pantyhose off," Johnston said.

Johnston's support has allowed Ex Fabula to offer more workshops and storytelling events for youth, which can be quite transformative for participants, said Megan McGee, the organization's executive director.

"He understands the importance of the arts," she said. "It's important to realize you are not alone and that people support you. Speak your truth and be affirmed and validated. That is not just art access – it is important for our mental health to feel connected and not alone."

Nowadays, when not hosting standing events such as bingo every Tuesday night at Miss Katie's Diner, a show at La Cage every third Saturday or Club Charlie's Sunday Funday Show Tunes on Sundays, Johnston/KV can be found emceeding or performing at fundraising events to benefit the Valentine Fund.

"It's my gift back," Johnston said about the fund. "It's my thank you. It's my legacy."

'WE WANTED LONGEVITY'

ALAS establishes Foundation fund to continue services

In 2021, as the world slowly emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, Alba Jimenez, mother of three, needed some assistance. Her 23-year-old is neurotypical, but her 7-year-old and 9-year-old are both neurodivergent, having been diagnosed with autism and one with chromosome 9p deletion syndrome.

"I needed support as the mother of two children with disabilities," she said. "In that moment, I had a lot of doubts and questions, and in this group, I found the answers."

That group is ALAS, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting families of children and youth with diverse abilities through workshops, education, support groups, advocacy and more. ALAS launched in 1997 with the goal of providing resources and services for non-English-speaking mothers. Since then, it has served more than 40,000 families.

In January 2025, ALAS established an agency endowment fund, ALAS Community Legacy Fund, at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation.

"We wanted ALAS to have longevity, so investing in long-term goals was a priority of the board," Elsa Diaz-Bautista, executive director of ALAS, said. "The Greater Milwaukee Foundation checked many boxes for us. It invests our money well, it's here in the community and it helps other organizations similar to ours."

Diaz-Bautista joined the nonprofit in 2014 after meeting the founder, Monica Lopez, at Disability Advocacy Day in

Madison. Diaz-Bautista helped interpret for them. At the time, Diaz-Bautista was advocating on behalf of her daughter, who has developmental and cognitive disabilities.

ALAS is actively growing its endowment fund through conversations with partners and supporters who believe in the importance of community-based organizations.

Adjusting with the times

ALAS first became connected with the Foundation during the pandemic when it received \$12,900 in grant support for its temporary food distribution program.

"We adjust with the times," Diaz-Bautista said. "A food distribution program is not one of our core services, but at the time, there was a lot of food insecurity within our community and within our families ... The Foundation is an expert at recognizing the need in the community and mobilizing to meet those needs."

While the food distribution program is no longer active, ALAS's core services remain. Currently, it actively serves 400 families.

Patricia Hernandez's son has autism. The group helped her navigate how to get him an individualized education program and helped them both realize his capabilities.

"We learned that our children can do many things; they can do more than we can help them with," she said.

Through ALAS, Rocio Leyva, who started as a volunteer, realized her son had undiagnosed conditions that the school hadn't evaluated because of his behavioral issues. The group helped her advocate for him.

ALAS continues to advocate for programs that are beneficial to the disability community such as Wisconsin's IRIS program (Include, Respect, I Self-Direct), a long-term care program with Medicaid for older adults and adults with disabilities, and the Supported Decision-Making Agreement, which provides an alternative form of guardianship.

Maria Barajas has been involved in the group for 20 years. She often brings her youngest son, Diego, to community events to help him gain a little independence. Diego, who was born with Down syndrome, prefers to stay home where he can color and draw.



ALAS is a nonprofit dedicated to supporting families of children and youth with diverse abilities.

"ALAS provides a lot of information and services, and if there's something specific that our family needs, ALAS looks for that information for us," Barajas said. "I urge families to learn more so they can be advocates. It's for everyone, not just families with special needs."



“We wanted ALAS to have longevity, so investing in long-term goals was a priority of the board.”

*Elsa Diaz-Bautista
ALAS executive director*

A mother and her children at an ALAS support group event.

3 ways we are investing in physical health

Across Milwaukee and Wisconsin, organizations are rethinking what good health and health care can look like – expanding who delivers it, who has access to it and what it takes into account. In 2025, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and its donors provided over \$7 million to organizations focused on health-related programs and projects. Here are three examples of physical health-related investments to organizations that are meeting people where they are and building something more whole in the process.

Wisconsin Doulas of Color Collective

Walking into a doctor's office or any health care institution can be daunting, but walking in to find a familiar face there makes it less so. The Wisconsin Doulas of Color Collective, which launched over a decade ago, is that familiar face for its clients.

A doula often advocates for their client while providing physical and emotional support and information. WIDOCC's current roster has 15 doulas, whose services range from birth and postpartum to end of life and bereavement.

Executive Director DeAnna Tharpe explained that WIDOCC aims to increase awareness of doulas in Wisconsin while providing care and respite services for those doing the work. In recent years, providers have become more accepting and understanding of doulas, recognizing that they are there to assist.

When a doula is working with a client, they're "on call" 24/7. Through WIDOCC, a doula can ask for backup during birth or call one another to decompress.

Since 2024, the Foundation has given WIDOCC \$100,000 in grants. Through its workshops, WIDOCC focuses on reproductive health and reproductive justice for Black maternal health as well as "healing the healer."



Wisconsin Doulas of Color Collective provides professional, quality childbirth education and doula services.

Bread of Healing Clinic

Bread of Healing Clinic doesn't charge its patients, so they show their gratitude in other ways, from mangoes to warm tamales and more.

When the clinic first began in 2000, Barbara Horner-Ibler, medical director, physician and co-founder, didn't anticipate it would exist two decades later. Over the years, the clinic's services have expanded to include behavioral health, dental health and social work.

Its three locations provide free medical care and medications to uninsured and low-income adults. Experienced volunteer staff work with patients dealing with chronic conditions from diabetes to hypertension to high cholesterol.

Over the past 20 years, the Foundation and its donors have provided the clinic with more than \$834,000 in support. The most recent grant supported clinic operations. The Foundation's consistent partnership and willingness to support new initiatives helped launch the MedShare program in 2006, which provides medication to patients and subsidizes salaries for three part-time physicians to enhance continuity of care.



Margaret Dunn, a physician with the Bread of Healing Clinic, and a clinic volunteer.

Legacy Home and Respite Care Foundation

Shanelle Snowden lost her mom to early onset dementia in 2016. After her mom's passing, Snowden took a step back and realized the toll caregiving had taken on her and her family.

In June 2023, she launched Legacy Home and Respite Care Foundation, a nonprofit that offers educational and community support for caregivers with an emphasis on underserved communities and care rooted in culture and lived experience. Eighty-five to 90 percent of the caregivers it serves are Black or Latino. In 2025, it served 55 family caregivers.

When the organization first started, many caregivers felt burned out. Here, caregivers can join support groups or take advantage of wellness opportunities, from yoga classes to art classes to fellowship, at no charge.

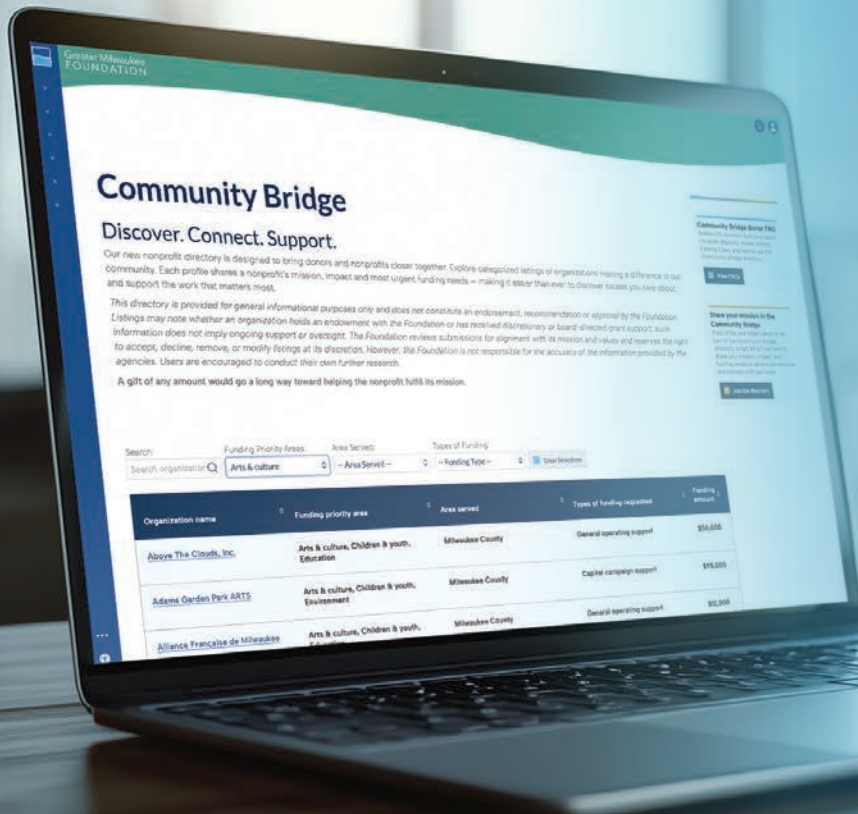
The organization received a \$105,400 capital grant in 2025 to create the Caregiver Sanctuary, which is set to open in July 2026. Located on Milwaukee's northwest side, the 1,500-square-foot space is in partnership with Progressive Medical Group, a family practice clinic, and Hayat Pharmacy. It offers a place for the group's various services, including a place for caregivers to drop their loved ones off so the caregivers can have some self-care and respite.



Legacy Home and Respite Care Foundation's new space, set to open in July 2026, will provide space to offer wellness opportunities and other services for free to caregivers.

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Community Bridge, a new online tool the Foundation launched this spring, gives donors a direct path to the causes they care about most and gives organizations a powerful way to share their work with people ready to invest in it. Donors can browse organizations by interest area, discover their most pressing funding needs and explore in clear, concrete terms how a gift will be put to work.

The needs in our community are real. So is the generosity. Community Bridge brings both together.

Discover Community Bridge at greatermilwaukeefoundation.org/communitybridge